

Women's Rights National History Trail

Feasibility Study

Study Report
2002

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Source: Historic American Building Survey, Library of Congress

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Resolved, that all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature and therefore of no force or authority.
-Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

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Executive Summary

The Omnibus Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1999 (P.L. 105-277) provided \$100,000 for a trail study related to Women's Rights National Historical Park. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (D-Rochester NY) was the primary sponsor for this study and earlier had introduced legislation directing the National Park Service to study the feasibility of designating a women's rights national historic trail from Boston, Massachusetts to Buffalo, New York. Although that bill was unsuccessful on its own, language in the Omnibus Appropriations Act accomplished that purpose.

The interdisciplinary study team worked with National Park Service historians and academic scholars to define the women's rights movement and to understand it within the context of American history. Using the goals expressed in the Declaration of Sentiments adopted at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention as a framework, the study team defined women's rights broadly to seek equality in the realms of *politics* – women's suffrage; *education* – women's access to higher education and professional schools; *economics* – women access to and rights within the workplace; *religion* – women's roles and leadership in religious institutions; and *family and society* – reflected in efforts that were fostered by women to reform laws and customs on behalf of women.

Far from being a "special interest" confined to a corner of American history, the long pursuit of equality between the sexes is an immensely important theme in American history. The struggle for equal rights has altered the way the American labor force is structured and the way working people perceive their labor. It has changed the deeply private experiences of family life, parenthood, marriage and sexual behavior. It has altered how we understand the purpose and justification of government, the meaning of American citizenship, and the extent to which democratic principles are applicable in modern society.

To establish a context, the study team assembled and mapped a sample of women's rights history properties throughout the Northeast, encompassing an area reaching from Maine to Virginia and including the District of Columbia. The women's rights property sample should not be considered comprehensive and is by no means definitive. It is merely a reconnaissance-level survey used by the study team to develop a better understanding of the number and types of properties that still exist. In

all, nearly 300 known women's rights history properties were identified. The largest number of properties in the Northeast were in Massachusetts and New York. In Massachusetts, most of the known properties were clustered in the Greater Boston area. In New York, they were dispersed throughout the state with a cluster of properties located in a crescent shaped area roughly bounded by Rochester in the west, Syracuse in the east, and Seneca Falls and Waterloo in between. Based on existing information, a fairly dense corridor of women's rights history properties is also found along the Eastern Seaboard, running from Boston to Washington, DC.



Source: Library of Congress

Three Suffragists Casting Votes in New York City, c. 1917

Resolved, that it is the duty of the women of this country to
secure to themselves their sacred right to elective franchise.

-Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

Having completed this preliminary research, the study team was ready to address the question of designating a women's rights national historic trail. Under the National Trail System Act, a national historic trail must meet the following criteria:

- A. *It must be a historically used trail or a route.*
- B. *It must be of national significance.*
- C. *It must possess significant potential for public use and enjoyment.*

While the women's rights movement and many of its associated properties would meet the criteria for national significance and potential for public use and enjoyment, a trail composed of these properties would not meet the first criterion as a physical, historical route such as the Santa Fe or Lewis & Clark trails.

The study team also considered the feasibility of designating a long-distance auto tour route in the corridor between Boston and Buffalo. While there are heavy concentrations of properties in the Greater Boston area in Massachusetts and in the Rochester-Seneca Falls-Syracuse area of New York, an extensive area between these two places has very few properties. From management and visitor experience standpoints, this geographic gap made a long-distance auto route much less viable.

After determining that the long-distance trail concept was not viable, the study team developed other concepts that could support the recognition, promotion, and protection of women's rights history properties. Three concepts emerged:

First is the "*Votes for Women*" *History Trail* in Upstate New York. The "*Votes for Women History Trail*" is a single, geographically discrete signed auto route linking a number of properties associated with women's suffrage in the area bordered by Rochester in the west, Syracuse in the east, and Seneca Falls and Waterloo in between. Authorized as part of Women's Rights National Historical Park, the National Park Service would work cooperatively with identified women's suffrage properties in the designated area. The National Park Service would support the development of a guidebook, a signage system, indoor and outdoor exhibits, and interpretive and educational programs. This concept would also provide a limited matching grant program to assist the historic preservation and interpretation of participating properties.

The annual cost of staffing and operating the trail would be approximately \$275,000. Planning and implementation costs for the trail would be about \$500,000. The historic preservation matching grant program would require about \$250,000 per year over a five-year period.

Other concepts emerged that would be national in scope and would acknowledge the importance of women's rights in the history of the United States as a whole. First is a *National Women's Rights History Project*. Under this concept, the National Register program would lead a collaborative effort with state historic preservation offices nationwide to survey, evaluate, and nominate women's rights history properties to the National Register of Historic Places. Through the National Register program, the National Park Service would offer annual grants to state historic preservation offices for up to 5 years to support this work. The National Park Service would also expand and enhance the current National Register travel itinerary website, "Places Where Women Made History," so that the results of the inventory are made available to the general public. As is the case now, the website would make people aware of where historic properties are and which ones are open to the public, and would also provide links to related websites when available.

The annual cost of National Park Service staffing and operating the *National Women's Rights History Project* would be approximately \$600,000. Project funds to support research, publications, and enhancement of the existing "Places Where Women Made History" website would require about \$1.4 million. Grants to state historic preservation offices nationwide would require about \$1.2 million per year for 5 years— with a total estimated cost of \$12.5 million.

The final concept enhances the *National Women's Rights History Project* by creating a partnerships network. Under the *National Women's Rights History Project and Partnerships Network*, the National Park Service would foster the development of a partnership-based network offering financial and technical assistance. The Network would emphasize partnerships among properties and strong collaborative proposals. The Network would offer matching grants and technical assistance for interpretive and educational program development. Matching grants for historic preservation specific to the network could also be made available through the state historic preservation offices. The Network would be managed through a non-governmental organization, identified through a competitive process, which would work in partnership with the National Park Service and state historic preservation offices to coordinate operation of the network. The National Park Service's financial support for the Network would cease after a prescribed period of time – possibly 10 years – at which point the Network should be able to operate independently.

The annual cost of staffing and operating the National Women's Rights History Project and Partnerships Network would be approximately \$1.1 million. Project funds to support planning, research, publications, technical assistance, and enhancement of the existing "Places Where Women Made History" website would require about \$2.1 million. Grants to state historic preservation offices nationwide to inventory and document women's rights historic properties would require about \$1.2 million per year for 5 years – a total estimated cost of \$12.5 million. The proposed matching grant fund for historic preservation is projected to require \$ 3 million per year for 5 years with a total estimated cost of \$15 million.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

-Declaration of Sentiments, 1848